

# Excavations at the Priory of St. Mary Magdalene of Lund, Monk Bretton

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Excavations undertaken in 2010 at Monk Bretton Priory, South Yorkshire represent the first substantive investigation of the monastery since its initial clearance in the 1920s and 1950s, and the only campaign of works to be fully recorded and published. Trenches were located to the west and north of the monastic church to reveal features thought to relate the occupation of the site by the Blithman and Talbot families in the mid to late sixteenth century. Evidence for the post-Dissolution remodelling of earlier medieval structures was encountered, as was a rich assemblage of finds belonging to all periods of occupation. Although relatively small in scale, the excavations provide an interesting insight into how the new owners sought to repurpose the religious house to secular use.

KEYWORDS Monk Bretton priory, excavation, dissolution, Blithman, Talbot

## Introduction

The Priory of St. Mary Magdalene of Lund, better known as Monk Bretton Priory, is located two miles east of Barnsley (SE376066). A general account of the priory compiled by Walker (1926) covers the monastic period in particular depth, and a more recent study has concentrated on the post-Dissolution history and architecture of the site (Willmott & Bryson 2013).

The monastery was founded by Adam FitzSwane around the year 1154, as a dependant house of the Cluniac Priory of St. John of Pontefract. Although the initial gift of lands and income were limited, over the next century the house grew in size and wealth through grants of new lands and tithes (Walker 1926, 6–8). However, the community was in frequent conflict, first with the motherhouse at Pontefract, and subsequently the principal house of the order at Cluny. This led eventually to Monk Bretton splitting from the Cluniac Order in 1280/1 to become an independent Benedictine institution.

The monastery continued to prosper and on its final surrender on 21 November 1538 its annual income was valued at £246 19s 4d, and the value of all stock goods and furniture came to a further £419 11s 10d. Included in the valuation were an estimated

59 fothers of lead and seven bells, which were ordered to be melted down and sent to London (Walker 1926, 52).

In 1539 one of the commissioners, William Blithman, who had taken part in the valuation of the monastery, was initially given a twenty-one year lease on the property which the following year became a grant of the house and site of the priory, as well as certain demesne lands. After William's death the site remained in the possession of the Blithman family, although it is possible they may not have resided there rather being domiciled at their manor at New Laithes less than three miles away.

Just over forty years after the Dissolution, in 1580, the priory site was purchased from Blithman's heirs by George Earl of Shrewsbury, apparently on the direction from his wife Elizabeth 'Bess of Hardwick', and granted to his fourth son Henry on his wedding to Elizabeth Reyner (Willmott & Bryson 2013, 145). Henry Talbot fell ill very suddenly in January 1596 and his brief will left two-thirds of his estate to his wife Elizabeth (of which half would pass to his eldest daughter Mary on her 18th birthday), the remainder to be held for his other two daughters Elizabeth and Gertrude. There was no specific mention of what was to happen to Monk Bretton in this will, but Elizabeth Talbot remarried Thomas Holcroft later that same year, so is also unlikely to have resided at Monk Bretton. When Elizabeth's father, William Rayner, died in 1606 he bequeathed the estate to Henry Talbot's second daughter Mary. It remained in her possession until her death in 1675.

## Archaeological background

Monk Bretton is one of a number of monastic sites in Yorkshire that retain significant archaeological evidence for reuse and occupation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1990 Glyn Coppack stated 'one of the most important (future research topics) is, quite simply, to discover what happened to our monasteries and their estates after they ceased to be corporations of piety and workshops of prayer' (Coppack 1990, 146). To date there has been relatively little work following up this call, and Monk Bretton provides the perfect opportunity for a study into post-Dissolution reuse. Consequently, a programme of survey and excavation was undertaken in 2010, which sought to address two key questions concerning post-medieval activity on the site.

The first was to evaluate the nature of any activities taking place for the forty-two year period between 1538 and 80 when the site was under the ownership of the Blithman family. It is a distinct possibility that the family never resided at the site, possibly purchasing it for economic rather than domestic reasons. The second concerned the period coinciding with the Talbot occupation of the site. Interestingly there are relatively few pieces of surviving upstanding masonry dating to the later sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, and those that can be identified immediately to the west of the old abbot's lodgings, principally the inserted stair tower, hardly seem consistent in status or extent for a residence of the son of one of the richest peers of the realm. Given that it is known that a probable sixteenth-century range immediately west of Abbey Lane was demolished as late as the 1920s, identifiable only in two surviving photographs (Fig. 1) and an 1899 engraving by Helen James (Fletcher, 1900, 275), it was thought likely that the more substantial portions of the Shrewsbury mansion had been removed and might only remain as sub-surface features.

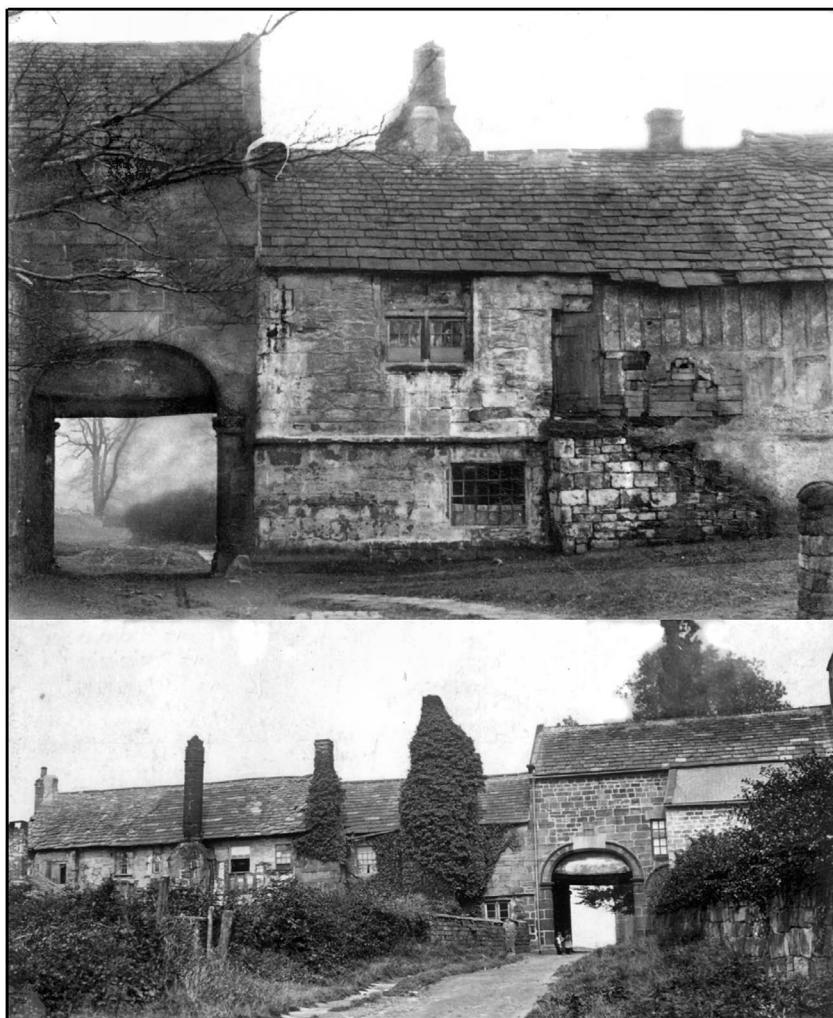


FIGURE 1 Demolished range of the priory, looking south (top) and north (bottom), (reproduced by courtesy of Barnsley Archives and Local Studies Department).

### Previous interventions on the site

Despite significant alteration and demolition in recent centuries, the general location of the priory has always been known, and the earliest depiction is in a sketch by Samuel Buck made in c.1720 (Hall 1979, 127). Although far from detailed, this clearly shows the ruinous south wall of the frater. According to the Victorian local historian Richard Jackson, the position of the monastic cemetery was identified in 1762 when a particularly dry summer resulted in the location of two monumental slabs. Jackson also stated that 'Little now remains of the priory. Within the last few years a great part of the ruins has been removed and the stone used for the erection of farm buildings' (Jackson 1858, 239–41), suggesting that prior to the mid-nineteenth century the remains may have been much more extensive.

It was in 1923, when undertaking ground works to create a tennis court, that the then landowner Mr John Vincent Horne accidentally rediscovered the chancel of the monastic church, which at that point remained completely obscured. Horne subsequently contacted the Yorkshire Archaeology Society on 19 February 1923 stating his intention to continue exposure of the remains and asking their advice. It is normally thought that JW Walker from the Yorkshire Archaeological Society was responsible for directing the ensuing excavations (e.g. Graham & Gilyard-Beer 1986, 5), presumably because of his publication of a descriptive account in 1926. However, it is clear from the surviving correspondence from Horne to Walker, now preserved in the archives of the Yorkshire Archaeology Society (Horne, 1923-27), that Horne undertook all the work himself with only very occasional visits from Walker. Horne's digging concentrated initially at the east end of the church, as far west as the ends of the transepts, before moving to uncover most of the cloister court. The 1931 OS map (2nd revision) shows this progress, and the following year digging by Horne had stopped, as at this point he sold the site.

Although the priory was initially purchased by the Barnsley Corporation, four-fifths of the site, now the current guardianship area, were almost immediately handed over to the Office of Works in 1932 (Barnsley Chronicle 9 July 1932), and their officials took a direct interest in the site. Sir Charles Reed Peers had already visited Monk Bretton at least twice before its acquisition in 1923 and 1924, but the next stage of works was undertaken by the then Inspector of Ancient Monuments, P. K. Baille Reynolds. As is often typical on sites cleared by the Office of Works excavation records are scarce. However, at Monk Bretton this is even more extreme than at most other sites, and with the exception of a single sketch plan (discussed below), there is not one formal record, receipt, or note in a day book to give an indication of what excavation work took place and when. What is clear is that at some point between the sale of the site in 1932-1961, when the OS 3rd revision shows the site to be laid out as it appears today, the main portion of the nave of the church, the kitchens and the guest house were all exposed for the first time. Work on clearing the nave was certainly taking place in 1934, when two reporters from the Barnsley Chronicle wrote of their visit to see Mr Black the foreman of works, who showed them a recently unearthed stone coffin and skeleton which had been found 'twenty-seven feet from the west wall of the nave', and included a photograph of the find (*Barnsley Chronicle* 10 March 1935).

More records survive in the form of letters sent by Baille Reynolds to various superintendents of works, outlining how the upstanding fabric should be treated. Following one fleeting visit in June 1937, he ordered that in the area of the prior's parlour 'the whole roof be removed' and 'walls ... to be taken down a few courses from the top of the wall' (National Archives PRO WORKS 14/750). The gatehouse was treated in similar fashion, having more recent additions demolished and the 'roof ... to be stripped and timbers reused'.

The one excavation for which some information does survive took place in or shortly before 1950, and was recorded in a sketch plan by J. K. Thompson (Fig. 2). This shows an area of walls exposed to the north of the north transept of the church, in what Thompson thought represented two phases of building. Whilst there is a great deal of ambiguity about what these walls might represent, what is clear is that once uncovered the remains were not thought worthy of consolidation and display. This is made apparent on a separate plan in the National Monuments Record, a 1937 labelled survey of the priory,

to which a copy of Thompson's sketch had been subsequently added. Importantly, this has then been encircled and labelled 'covered in'.

Given the apparent lack of concern shown by the Ministry of Works for the building remains exposed in 1950, (they are certainly never highlighted in any official publications),

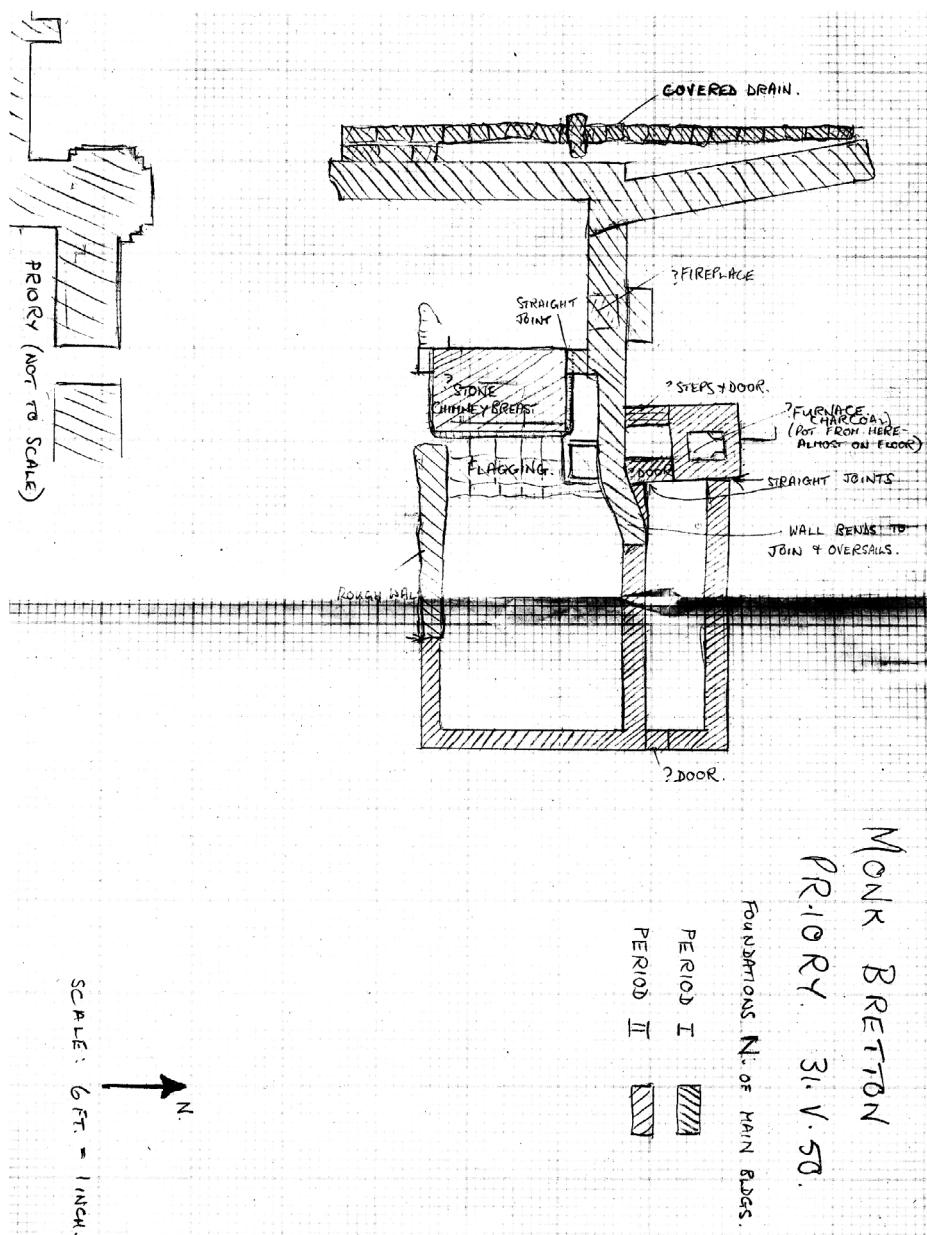


FIGURE 2 Plan by J. K. Thompson 31/5/50 (Monk Bretton Priory Archive Index No. 2.20, EH Helmsley).

as well as the absence of an obvious explanation as to what their function might be if they were medieval, it was hypothesised that what had actually been encountered related to the post-Dissolution remodelling of the site. Given this, in 2010 the authors focused their research on this area with the intention of re-excavating, recording and reinterpreting these remains. A full unpublished archive report on these excavations has been produced (Willmott & Townend 2014), the results of which are summarised in this paper for the first time. The excavation archive and finds have been deposited with English Heritage in Helmsley.

## The excavation

A trench measuring  $13.5 \times 9$  m orientated east–west and parallel to the north transept of the church was excavated in the area indicated by Thompson's plan (Fig. 3). Subsequently, small extensions measuring  $3 \times 1.5$  m to its south-west and  $3 \times 1$  m on its north section were made to sample features deemed to be important that ran beyond the confines of the initial trench.

The trench confirmed that Thompson's sketch plan was broadly accurate in depicting the layout of the major walls as well as other features such as the north–south running drain and the large stone chimney base. Other features, such as 'steps + door' and his tentative phasing were shown to be incorrect, although this is hardly surprising given the nature of the original excavation.

However, the excavation also revealed the very considerable disturbance the original 1950s investigation had caused, and this presented the current excavators considerable problems in interpreting and phasing the structural remains. Not only had many of the medieval and post-medieval deposits been removed piecemeal, the principal excavation strategy employed was the clearing of narrow slit trenches either side of the walls to at least their lowest foundation depth and often beyond (Fig. 4). This effectively truncated almost all the structural features from their surrounding stratigraphic layers. Such methods made the absolute phasing of almost all structures extremely difficult, and the conclusions outlined below might be subject to revision if larger scale excavations were undertaken in the future. Nonetheless, four clear phases of activity could be identified.

### *Phase 1 twelfth–thirteenth century*

Only very fragmentary remains dating to the earliest identifiable phase were encountered during the excavation, and this was in part the result of the heavy truncation of these by later activities taking place on the site. However, as the primary research aims of the excavation were to make sense of the results of the earlier Ministry of Works interventions, and to see if these could shed light on the post-Dissolution phases of the monastery, the vast majority of the surviving medieval strata were left undisturbed. Furthermore, as no portion of the trench was excavated to natural, there could well be earlier, as yet unidentified, phases present.

The only archaeological features relating to this phase are three disjointed sections of wall, although their alignment and similar construction strongly suggest they are closely related (Fig. 5). Two fragments, [1089] and [1092] were located in the centre of the trench both on the same ENE–WSW alignment. Both sections only remained to the height of

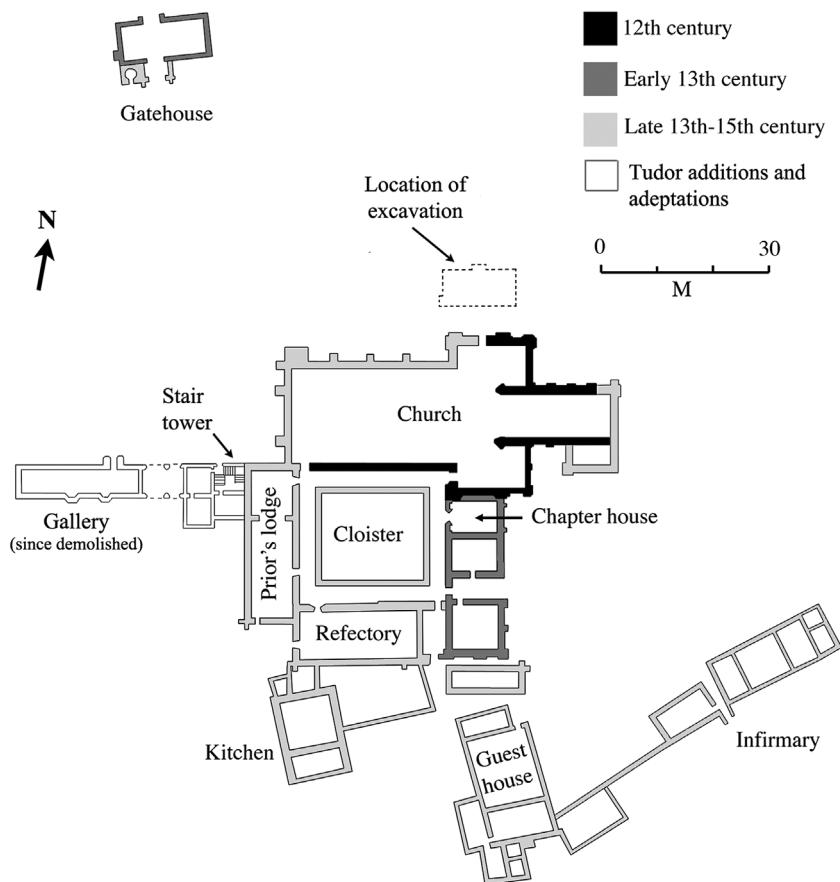


FIGURE 3 Location of the 2010 excavations.

a single course and it was clear that these had been intentionally demolished when the area was completely remodelled during Phase 2. The third wall section, [1106], was in the north-west corner of the trench on a NNW-SSE alignment, placing it perpendicular to the others. This wall survived to the height of four courses, as it was incorporated into the later Phase 2 and Phase 3 buildings. It also apparently survived, at foundation level at least, well into the twentieth century, where it is visible on both earlier OS maps and photographs as the wall running north to join the south-east corner of a still-standing building.

No other features or deposits relating to these Phase 1 walls were encountered, although a *terminus ante quem* for this phase is provided by soils containing fourteenth-century pottery that overlaid the demolished wall which were themselves sealed by subsequent Phase 2 activity.

It is difficult to interpret this phase on such scant remains, but one possibility is that the wall [1089] is the same as one suggested by Walker as forming the boundary between the outer and inner courts of the monastery by joining the transept to the administration



FIGURE 4 Re-excavated ministry of works wall-chasing cut.

building (Walker 1926, 82), although it is uncertain on what evidence he based this. However, if this is the case it seems possible that [1106] and [1092] form another, as yet unrecorded, boundary wall, perhaps dividing the cemetery from the outer precinct.

### ***Phase 2 fourteenth–early sixteenth century***

At some point during the fourteenth century almost all the Phase 1 structures, with the exception of wall [1089], were demolished and the construction of new buildings took place (Fig. 6). In the western portion of a trench a small square ‘cell’, Room A, measuring 2.8 m wide was constructed, this being formed by a large ashlar stone base [1053] to the east, a north–south running wall [1095] to the west and an east–west running wall [1074]. A corresponding east–west running wall [1075] had also clearly been present to the south, although this had subsequently been robbed and only three original stones remained at its east end and a single larger corner stone at its western joint with [1095]. Walls [1074] and [1095] had prominent foundation courses that were visible only on their inner faces and were jointed into the single surviving Phase 1 wall [1089]. Room A had originally been flagged, but these had subsequently been robbed out in Phase 3 and only two fragments, [1132] remained *in situ* in the north-eastern corner.

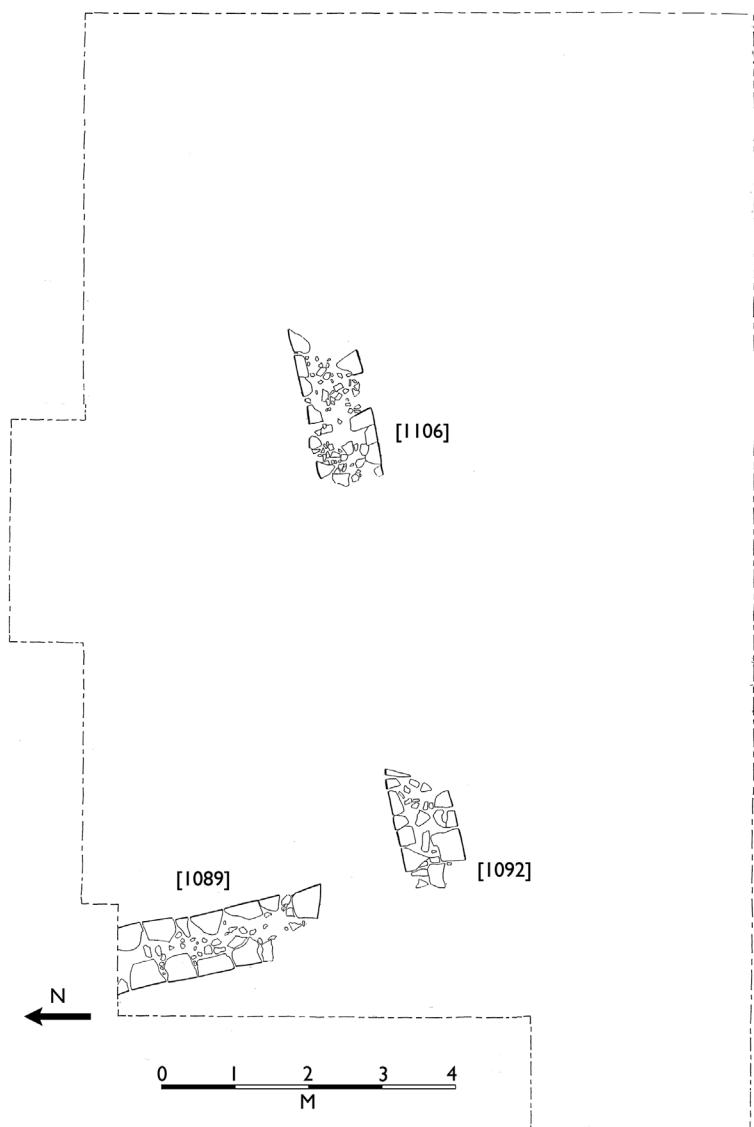


FIGURE 5 Phase 1 walls.

Further building work also took place to the north-east of this room. Jointed into wall [1074] and running at right angles to the north for 2.3 m was a rectangular structure, all of one build. This was formed by two parallel north-south running outer walls [1056] and [1004], and subdivided internally by [1071] into two 'compartments'. The southern, Compartment 1, had seen its south end significantly altered during later Phase 3 remodelling, but still retained its original flagged floor [1072] and two low internal 'steps' [1077] and [1078]. The northern Compartment 2 retained its original form, with a flagged floor [1073], and a drain to the north formed from finely dressed chamfered blocks [1069] supporting a lintel [1070] above. This opening exited onto an external

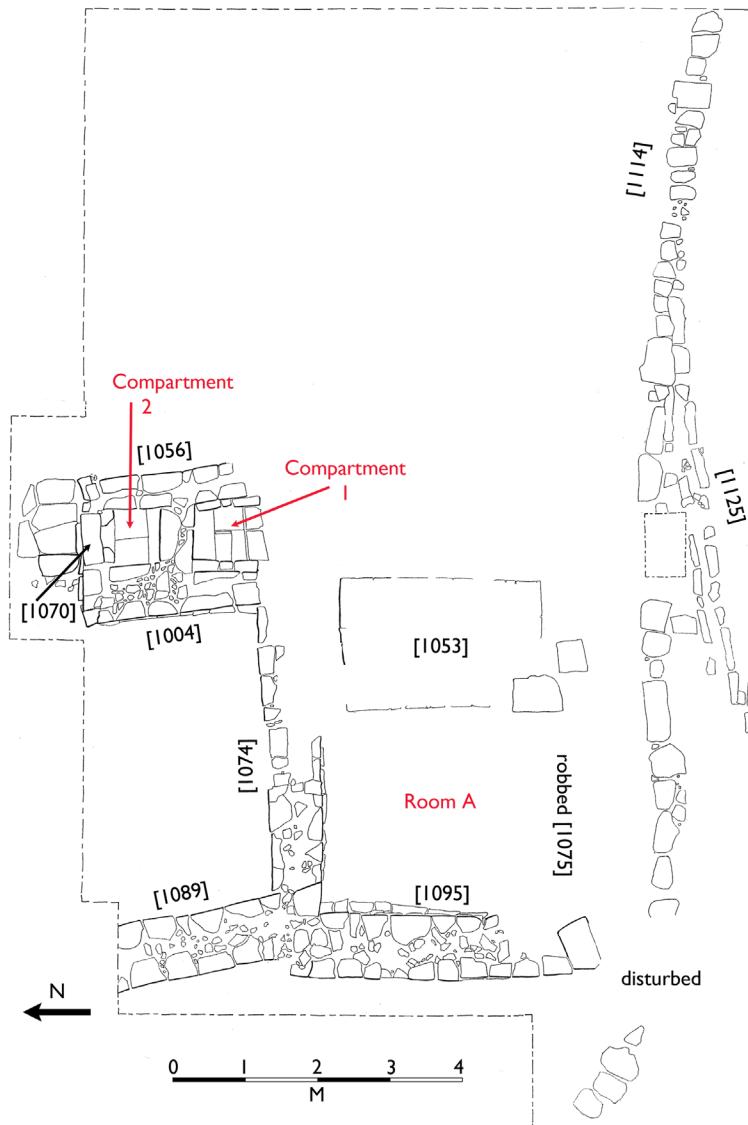


FIGURE 6 Phase 2 features.

flagged surface [1130], which formed an extension of [1073], flanked to the west by a disturbed, short, portion of wall [1131].

The remaining identifiable Phase 2 activity took place to the south and east of the newly constructed features. Along the southern edge of the trench was an external metalled surface, [1121] and [1113] formed from close-packed rounded cobbles. This was crossed by a succession of two of narrow drains, formed by vertical set stones with a flat cap, but no stone base. The earliest of these, [1125], originally curved in an arc as if it were sweeping around the whole of the north transept of the church. However, the western portion of this [1114] was later remodelled and straightened, and the cap from

the now redundant section of [1125] removed. This second drain continued almost due west, before reaching the south-western extension of the trench where it turned in a north-westerly direction. Sections were excavated across all portions of the drains, and whilst they were found to contain silty deposits, these included no material culture.

The final deposits relating to this phase, (1118) and (1119), were partially visible to the east of the ashlar base [1053] in the central portion of the trench. Both are probably the same soil, simply divided by later Phase 3 features [1126] and [1105]. (1118) was a dark brown rich soil, and (1119) was very similar but with a more significant proportion of charcoal flecks, and both contained ceramic predominantly of fourteenth–early sixteenth century date, as well as sherds of earlier abraded residual material. These soils were heavily disturbed, both by later Phase 3 activity, but more significantly by Ministry of Works wall chasing of later Phase 3 features. This twentieth-century activity had also cut into both surfaces, and truncated them from both the metalled surface [1113] to the south and the cell and rectangular structure to the west and north.

Interpretation of these features is very difficult. Room A was heavily modified in the subsequent phase, so its original function cannot be ascertained. However, the large ashlar base was clearly intended to support some heavy structural feature, and the presence of the flagged floor suggests the room was expected to experience heavy use. There is no apparent entry to this room, but this might have been via a door in the now-missing southern wall.

The function of the adjoining compartmentalised structure is also unclear. All deposits, both within the structure and surrounding it, were completely removed during the Ministry of Works excavations, and backfilled with a mixed modern soil. However, on his 1950 plan, Thompson annotated Compartment 2 as ‘Furnace Charcoal. Pot from here almost on floor’ (Fig. 3). Interpreting this feature as a ‘furnace’ is problematic, as whilst it may well have contained ash and charcoal, the stone faces showed no evidence for sustained burning, and the northern entrance formed by the chamfered stones and lintel [1069] and [1070] far more resemble a drain rather than a flue or stokehole. The pottery collected by Thompson was relocated in Sheffield Museum (and recently transferred to Barnsley, SHEFM: 1982.69), and this is clearly a late medieval single-handled urinal. The northern portion of this structure does indeed resemble the base of a close-shaft garderobe, and the presence of charcoal at the base would be consistent with this interpretation, as hearth ashes were frequently discarded within garderobes, both as a convenient repository but also to help deaden any noxious odours.

The metalled surfaces and the drains to the south of the trench were clearly external in nature, and both had experienced considerable wear suggesting that regular traffic was passing over them. Small drains are frequently found on monastic sites, particularly surrounding the church, where they were presumably used to manage both water coming off the roof and flowing on the surface. The latter would probably be particularly important at Monk Bretton, as the northern transept was cut quite significantly into the upward slope in this area, and would have been particularly susceptible to ground water wash.

### ***Phase 3 c.1539–1580***

In two areas it was possible to see the evidence for building disuse and robbing, before significant alterations were made to the existing structures. Within Room A the flagged

floor was lifted, apart from two portions in the north-east corner. Overlying both the remaining flags and the exposed earlier deposits was light silty soil which contained both residual later medieval ceramic and sixteenth-century Cistercian ware. A corresponding soil was also observed to the east of Room A, overlying the late medieval layers. This also contained a mixture of late medieval ceramic and sixteenth-century Cistercian wares. Both soils were only 1–2 cm thick and appeared to have built up relatively quickly. Given that both were subsequently disturbed by later Phase 3 activity dating to the mid sixteenth century, it seems likely that they developed in the short period between the closure of the monastery and the subsequent reuse of the site. It is also entirely likely that during this brief sub-phase other demolition or robbing of earlier features took place, although there was no evidence for this within the confines of the trench.

Significant alterations were made to the existing Phase 2 fabric and a range of new structures was constructed during this period (Fig. 7). The most significant of these was a series of walls in the eastern half of the trench. Three of these, [1029] [1035] and [1037], formed an enclosed space, Room B, that was orientated against the possible Phase 2 garderobe wall [1056] and the ashlar base [1053]. These three walls were much less substantial than those from the earlier phases; they lacked any evidence for clay or mortar bonding, and all appeared to have been built to a uniform height of around 30 cm. Furthermore, placed at the four corners formed by this arrangement were single large blocks of irregular cut and reused stone with flat upper surfaces. It was clear that these walls formed a low sleeper base for a timber structure, and the corner stones were used to support substantial vertical timbers. A 1m wide entrance was present in the southern wall [1037] with a reused threshold stone [1038] and an external step [1115], also fashioned from a reused ashlar block.

The eastern wall of Room B, [1035], extended over 1.65 m further to the north from the corner block and terminated at a second east–west running wall [1098], which in turn abutted the earlier garderobe [1056] forming a further thin compartment. Both the extensions of [1035] and [1098] only survived to a single course in height, and neither had substantial corner blocks for the support of vertical wooden posts. Given this and the very narrow nature of this area, it seems likely that this was a low ‘lean-to’ structure, constructed at the same time as Room B, but not to the same height.

Accurate dating of these walls is hampered by the fact that all were completely truncated from their contemporary layers by twentieth-century wall chasing. The interior of the narrow lean-to to the north of Room B had been fully emptied of all internal deposits, but it was possible to see that the wall [1098] had been built on top of the later medieval layer (1097). Apart from the area around its edges, the internal features of Room B did remain a little more intact. The most prominent of these was a thick stone base [1104] oriented perpendicular to wall [1037] and purposefully set with small stone packing (1127) into a cut [1126]. The fill from this packing around the stone base contained not only redeposited fourteenth–fifteenth-century ceramics, but also sixteenth-century Cistercian ware. To the north of the stone base was the only surviving section of flooring [1105], which was formed from reused stone roof tiles set flat as a rudimentary form of paving.

It was clear that the timber-framed building was constructed against the earlier garderobe and Room A, and at this point significant alterations were made to these earlier features. The most prominent of these was the arrangement of a large fireplace [1013] and chimney back [1014] on top of the earlier ashlar base [1053], but orientated eastwards

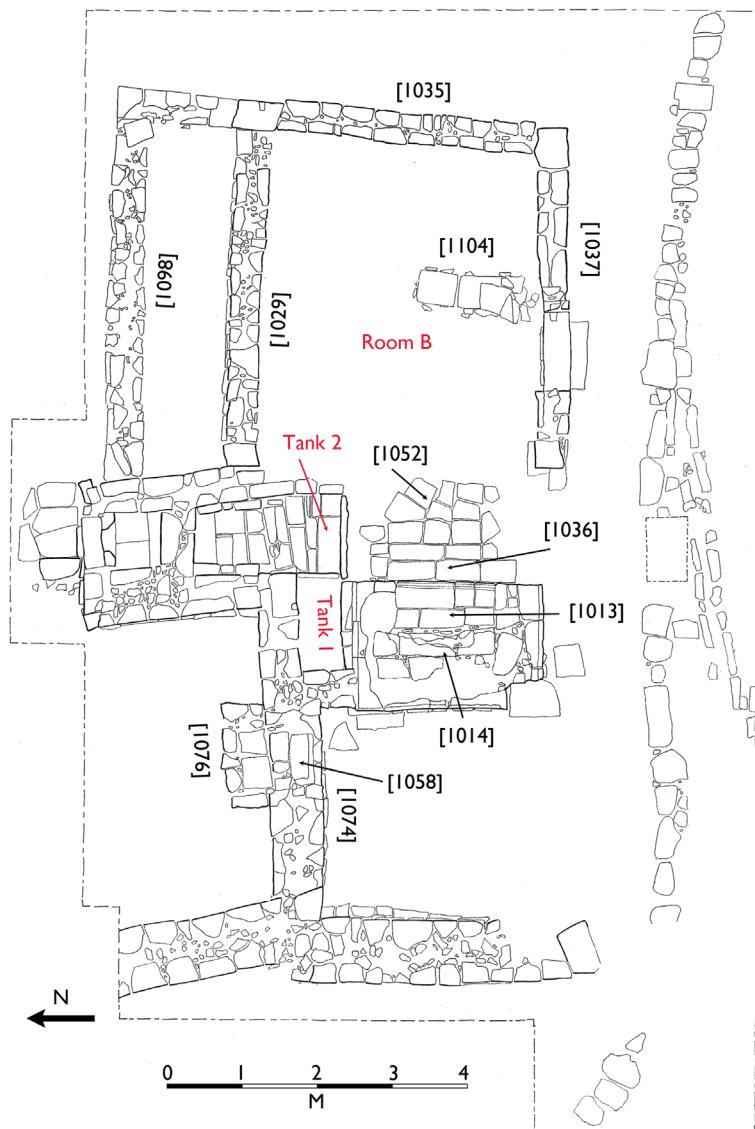


FIGURE 7 Phase 3 features.

into the new Room B. Both these elements were constructed from reused medieval fabric, as the fireplace edge had been cut short at its edges, and the moulding on the north, south and west sides was not contiguous all round. Set in front of the fireplace was a low step [1036] and a section of paving [1052] formed from reused irregular flags that were not aligned particularly well with one another.

The area to the north of this paving had clearly been significantly disturbed by the Ministry of Works, as there was a rectangular cut [1040] filled with a mixed modern fill (1041), which also covered the paving [1052]. The area to the south had also been nearly fully excavated previously, but the structural features had been left intact. Significant

rebuilding had taken place in Phase 3 to the pre-existing structures to the west. The eastern end of wall [1074] had its southern face rebuilt in order to narrow it by some 0.58 m, and a short blocking wall [1054] was inserted between [1074] and a newly constructed chimney back [1014]. At the same time it seems likely that the original south wall of Compartment 2 was removed and two vertical stone slabs [1055] and [1057] set on edge. This had the effect of creating two rectangular tanks around 30–40 cm deep. Tank 1, to the west, originally had two square-section joists or bars running north–south across it, evidenced by the presence of two square notches in the remodelled face of [1074] at just the right height so that the opposing ends would rest directly on the top of [1053]. Tank 2, directly to the east, had a new flagged floor [1059] which joined the earlier floor [1072] of the wardrobe to the south. Interestingly this new floor had very small stones laid on edge in a clay matrix within the cracks between the large flags, in what seems to have been an attempt to make the tank waterproof. The upper face of southern edge stone [1055] in Tank 2 was chipped and heavily abraded, presumably from whatever activity was taking place here. Over the top of Tank 2, but not blocking it, was an inserted wall [1001]. This acted as a continuation of wall [1074] crossing to join the western edge of [1056]. This wall was slight and built without any mortar, but apparently supported by a wooden lintel which had completely rotted to leave only a black stain 5–10 cm thick underneath [1001]. With the exception of this dark stain and some rubble below [1000], Tank 2 had been completely emptied in the 1950s. The same was not quite the case for Tank 1, where a small amount of silty soil remained at the western end and this contained one sherd of a sixteenth- or very early seventeenth-century Rhenish stoneware bottle.

The final alterations belonging to this phase took place within Room A, when a small fireplace [1058] was inserted into one wall [1074]. As with the larger fireplace [1013] this was made from reused medieval fabric, but its right side had been crudely cut off so that it would fit into the wall. A loose and unjointed dry stone chimney back [1076] was built against the external face of this wall.

To the south, a large soil build up (1085) occurred on top of the late medieval metalled surfaces [1121] and [1113] that was contemporary with this phase of remodelling. This soil build up contained a high proportion of sand and decayed mortar, making it distinctly yellow in colour. As well as a large quantity of Cistercian ware, this context included a number of fragments of medieval window glass, sections of twisted medieval window lead cames and cut flat roof lead, small scraps of copper sheet and wire and over 320 iron construction nails, as well as numerous unidentifiable iron fixtures and lumps. It is clear from the artefactual evidence that the layer (1085) represented a rapid soil build up connected with the stripping of fixtures and fittings from the monastic church in the period immediately following the Dissolution.

The Ministry of Works clearances had removed almost all deposits postdating the immediate Dissolution activity. The exceptions were in the south-western and north-western corners of the trench. In the former area two similar soils were truncated by the later wall [1011], (1023) to the east and (1021) to the west. (1023) in particular contained sixteenth-century Cistercian wares, a large quantity of dumped window glass (in excess of 400 mainly very small fragments), as well as further sections of lead window cames, and iron nails, all mixed with a large proportion of stone rubble. In the latter area, a small rectangular area of build up (1024) contained similarly dated ceramics, but rather less building rubble. Although limited in nature, these three contexts appear to all derive

from a final demolition of most standing structures in this area, with the exception of the contiguous north–south running walls [1095] and [1084], at some point during the second half of the sixteenth century. This broadly coincides with the change in ownership of the site from the Blithman to Talbot families.

#### *Phase 4 Late sixteenth–nineteenth centuries*

Very little activity seems to have taken place in the area of the trench between the late sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (Fig. 8). As mentioned above, walls [1095] and [1084]

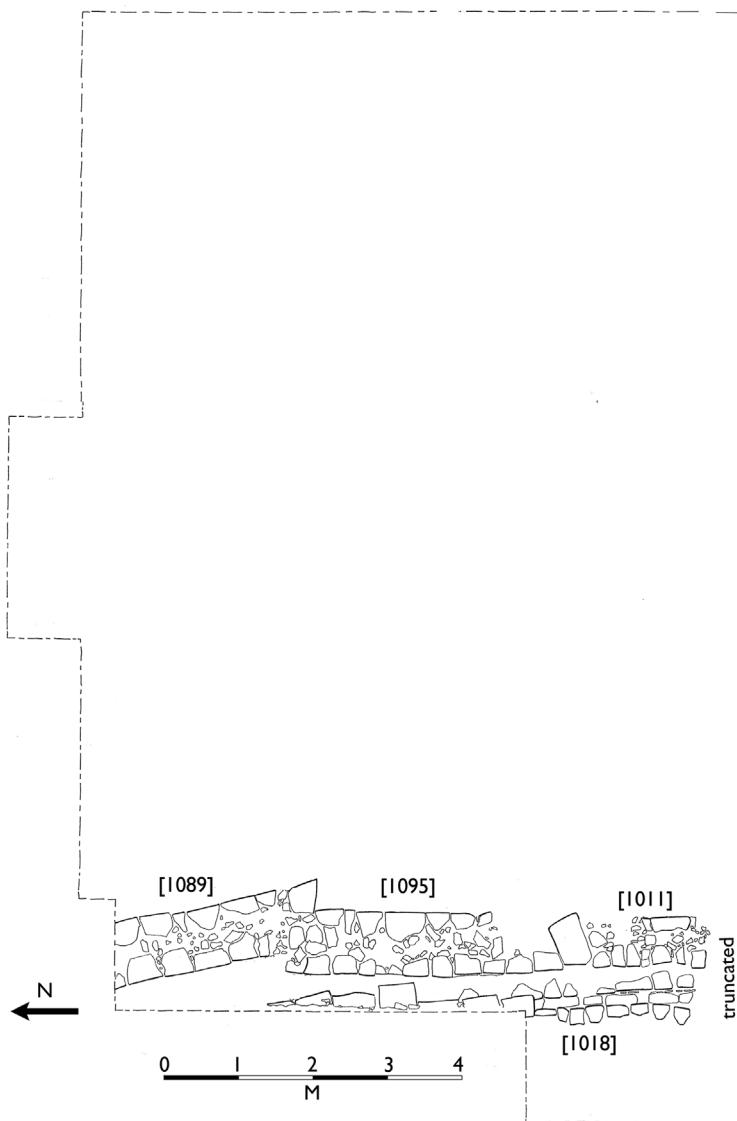


FIGURE 8 Phase 4 features.

seem to have been the only structural elements that survived above ground during this period. These were further extended to the south by a section of slightly thinner wall [1011], which was placed in a cut [1022]. At the same time this new section of wall was built, a new capped drain [1018] was also positioned parallel to the west of [1011] and running north alongside the reused wall [1095]. On excavation this was found to contain fragments of eighteenth-century Blackware as well as some small sherds of earlier ceramic that had presumably been washed into the drain.

## Conclusions

Given the limited nature of the interventions, and the disturbance created by later alterations, the excavation revealed relatively little structural evidence for the monastic phase of occupation. The three disjoined wall sections dating to the earliest twelfth to thirteenth-century phase are hard to interpret, and they may have been an element of the system of internal boundary walls dividing up the precinct. Another possibility is that they formed part of a building range running north of the transept which went out of use at the end of the thirteenth century, at just the point that the house ceased to be under Cluniac control. Such ranges are sometimes found at Cluniac houses where they are interpreted, on the basis of relatively little evidence, as sacristies, one of the most well preserved being at Castle Acre Priory (Raby & Baillie Reynolds 1952, 15). An alternative, and more likely explanation, was that the building located in this position performed a more domestic or service function, as well as serving to provide an effective separation between the inner court of the monastery and its cemetery lying immediately to the west of the excavation area.

The remodelling that took place in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century was clearly substantial, but was largely destroyed by post-Dissolution activity. However, the presence of an ashlar-built closed-shaft garderobe suggests that whatever was constructed here was, at least in part, residential in nature. One possible interpretation might be that this was another guesthouse hall, although its positioning so close to the north transept would be unusual. Other activities taking place in this area shortly before the Dissolution are suggested by the associated ceramics. As well as a range of ordinary domestic coarse- and table-wares, a small but significant collection of industrial vessels was recovered. Of these a relatively complete cucurbit contained a green residue, which XRF analysis revealed to be copper arsenate (Fig. 9). This compound was probably formed through the addition of arsenic, in the form of orpiment, to scrap copper dissolved in an oxidising acid (R. Doonan pers. comm.). The most likely function for this vivid, if highly toxic, compound would have been as a pigment (see FitzHugh 1997), and the small quantities produced might suggest that this was for manuscript illumination.

As at many similar monastic houses, excavation revealed artefactual evidence for the initial asset-stripping of the site, probably within weeks, if not days, of its surrender in March 1539. Spreads of burnt debris, containing high concentrations of nails, overlying the exterior surface between the north transept and the garderobe building are suggestive of the stripping and burning of wooden features from the church. Likewise some scattered finds of window glass and twisted lead cames are typical indicators of the removal and recycling of windows, although the majority of the glass and lead found in the trench was deposited at a later date. Although a residual find in a later context, a curved fragment of



FIGURE 9 Cucurbit with copper arsenate deposit (1:1).

copper alloy (apparently mirroring the shape of a crucible in which it had been melted) was recovered, and probably belonged to this initial Dissolution period (Fig. 10). XRF analysis showed it to be made from a tin-rich bronze that also included elevated levels of lead (R. Doonan pers. comm.). This composition was typical of medieval bell metal but also used for other vessels such as mortars, holy water stoops and other liturgical vessels (Blair & Blair 1991, 82–3).

After the initial post-suppression dumping the final phase medieval building was radically altered, coinciding with the Blithman family's occupation of the site. Most of the original structure was apparently removed, with the exception of the closed-shaft garderobe, and a timbre-framed building resting on low sleeper walls with a 'lean-to' on one side was constructed. Ministry of Works clearance had removed almost all deposits associated with this phase of building. However, the insertion of two stone-line tanks, the presence of a large fireplace constructed from reused medieval masonry and the setting of a heavy stone base into the floor suggest that the building had an industrial or agricultural purpose, and was most likely a smithy. This change in function, from ecclesiastical to agricultural mirrors other changes that seem to have been taking place in the claustral ranges, which saw the Blithmans developing the site into a rural estate centre (for a full discussion of these architectural developments see Willmott & Bryson 2013, 142–5).

Before the excavation was undertaken it was surmised that the buildings originally seen by Thompson in 1950 in the area of the trench might have formed part of the Talbot remodelling of the site after 1580. However, it is now clear that the main focus of the late Tudor mansion was the south and west claustral ranges, the prior's lodging and a new long gallery wing built to the west and joined with an inserted connecting stair tower (see Willmott and Bryson 2013, 147–51). Even though the area excavated in 2010 lay outside of the core of the late Tudor house, indirect evidence for its construction was encountered. The Blithman-period building was completely demolished, with the exception of its



FIGURE 10 Fragment of melted 'bell metal' from Trench 1 (1:1).

western end, which was retained as a north–south running boundary until the twentieth century. It was also during the later sixteenth-century phase when the majority of the medieval window glass and lead recovered from the trench was dumped. This suggests that it came from medieval buildings that had remained relatively unmolested during the Blithman occupation, most likely the claustral ranges, which in the 1580s were in the process of being converted into the Talbot mansion.

## The finds

Substantial assemblages of finds of late medieval to modern date were recovered from the excavation. Full analysis of all of these has been undertaken, although these reports are too lengthy to be reproduced in full here. Instead summaries are provided for the key assemblages of ceramics, glass, metals and animal bones. Comprehensive reports covering all find categories are included in the site archive.

### *Ceramics (Rachel Askew)*

The ceramic assemblage from Monk Bretton is largely typical of pottery consumed at monastic sites during the medieval and early post-medieval period, although it does contain a significant group of late medieval industrial vessels. There is a high degree of fragmentation within the assemblage and many of the sherds originate from disturbed contexts.

The majority of medieval fabrics originate from South Yorkshire, most notably Coal Measures White (also known as South Yorkshire Gritty ware B) and Coal Measures Purple (South Yorkshire Gritty ware A) which have identified production sites in the lower Don valley (Cumberpatch 2002, 175). Produced from the thirteenth to fourteenth and fourteenth to sixteenth centuries respectively, the range of vessels at Monk Bretton is typical of the forms produced, with jugs and jars, sometimes with decoration, predominating (Fig. 11). Very few sandy wares, such as Humberware, have been identified, suggesting

the excavated area was not primarily associated with the communal dining with which this fabric is usually associated (Cumberpatch 2002, 220).

The early post-medieval fabrics represented also largely originate from the South Yorkshire area. The decoration on many of the Cistercian ware vessels, including a posset pot lid and type one drinking vessel (Fig. 12) have clear parallels with similar vessels from a number of South Yorkshire production sites including Wrenthorpe and Silcoates, near Wakefield and Pothills, near Doncaster (Brears 1983, 217, Fig. 93.1; Boyle 2006, 127), although others may have originated from further afield. The presence of continental imports in the form of Rhenish stoneware from the Rhine valley and a Martincamp vessel from Northern France is unsurprising as these are relatively common on middle to high status sites of this period, including Sandal and Pontefract Castles (Moorhouse 1983, 155; Cumberpatch 2002, 194–195).

The industrial assemblage originates largely from a single, late medieval context, [1062]. It consists of at least seven vessels, six of which are largely complete, and is clear evidence of alchemical activities within the excavated area during the late medieval

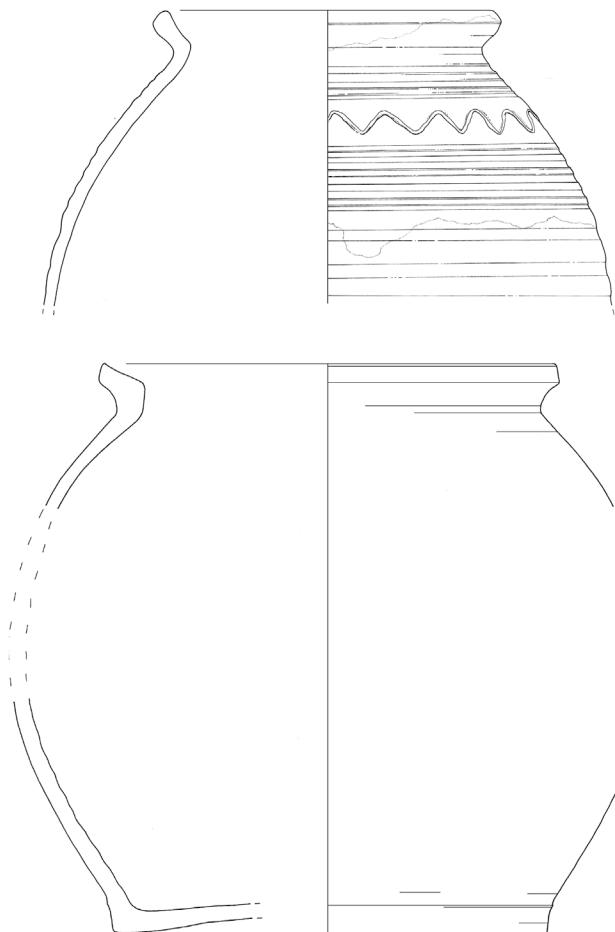


FIGURE 11 Ceramic coursewares (1:3).

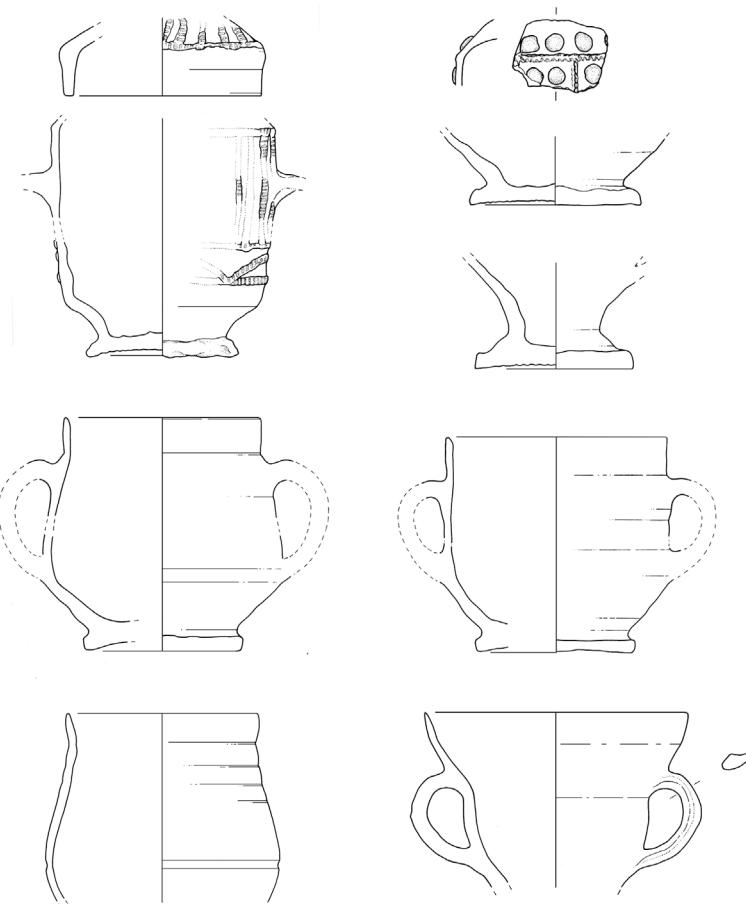


FIGURE 12. Cistercian wares (1:3).

period (Fig. 13). Vessel forms are closely paralleled by those at Sandal Castle (Moorhouse 1983, 191–194) and include crucibles, cucurbits and straight sided jars. Industrial assemblages have also been identified at a number of other monastic sites, including Pontefract Priory where, as at Monk Bretton, small jugs were also included within the assemblage (Moorhouse 1972, 96). However, unlike Pontefract Priory and Sandal, only one possible Humberware vessel has been found, with the majority of vessels being manufactured from Coal Measures White and Purple. In addition, one vessel is almost certainly an alembic, a form which is rare within industrial assemblages as this vessel type is more usually manufactured from glass (Moorhouse 1983, 194).

#### ***Glass and window cames (Claire Finn)***

The excavations produced approximately 1258 fragments of glass. The majority are very recent in date and are not discussed in this summary. Only four late medieval and sixteenth-century vessels were found. The first is a fragment from a colourless *façon*

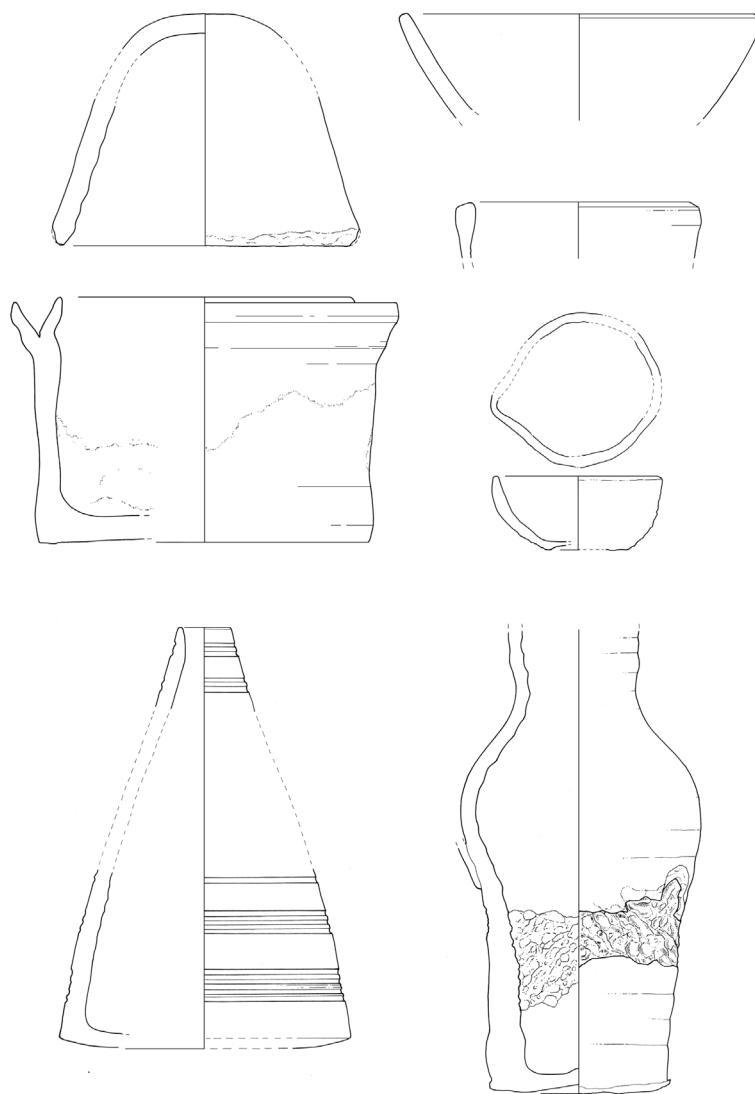


FIGURE 13 Industrial ceramics (1:3).

*de Venise* soda glass drinking vessel, decorated with opaque white marvered trails, in a *vetro a fili e retorti* style (Fig. 14). This fragment almost certainly came from a goblet bowl dating to the first half of the sixteenth century, and is of continental origin, although due to its small size it is not possible to reconstruct its form further. The second drinking vessel was found in context (1015). The fragment is deep cobalt blue, relatively thick (4 mm), and comes from a folded base of a pedestal beaker or goblet. It is further decorated with four white enamel dots running around just above the now lost tubular base-ring. Being only a small fragment it is difficult to date precisely, but this type of deeply coloured pedestal vessel usually dates to either the late fifteenth or first half of the sixteenth century (Willmott 2002, 70–2). The third drinking vessel is a large mid-fifteenth

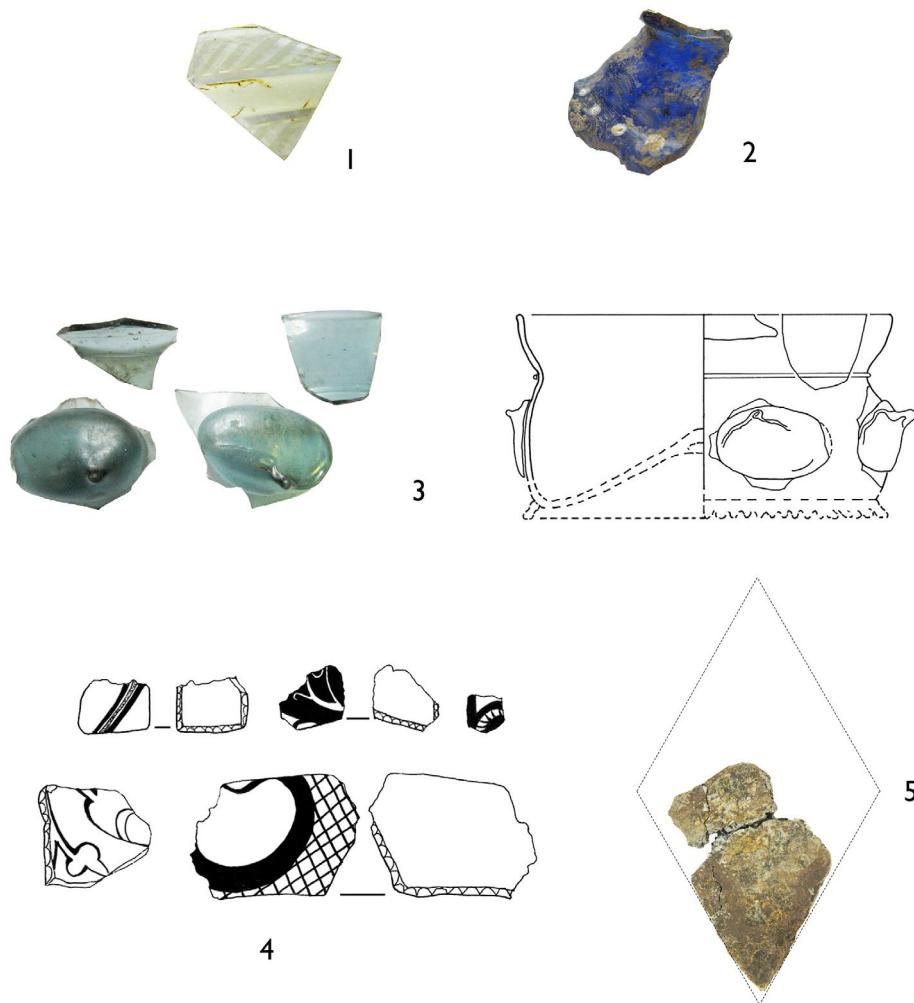


FIGURE 14 Glass (Nos 1–2 1:1, Nos 3–5 1:2).

to mid-sixteenth century forest glass *krautstrunk* or prunted beaker, in a mid-blue/green metal and with a rim diameter of 130 mm. This vessel type was popular in most areas of northern Europe from the late fifteenth to mid-sixteenth century. There are eleven small fragments, almost all certainly from the same vessel and including four prunts (diam. 40 mm), and were found spread across seven contexts indicating a significant level of post-depositional disturbance. The final vessel is represented by a single small fragment of base push-in from a small utilitarian green potash glass flask.

833 pieces of window glass from a number of different contexts were found. The first group of glass pieces originated from the medieval use of the site. This glass ranges between 2.5 mm and 5 mm in thickness with an uneven surface and internal bubbles, significant discolouration and granulated or flaking decay. It is difficult to ascertain the

date for these groups any further, due to the irregular nature of glass manufacture by the crown technique.

Seventeen pieces of painted window glass were recovered (Fig. 14). Most of the painted glass fragments were too degraded to interpret their design. Exceptions were two larger pieces painted with grisaille fronds and with cross-hatched backgrounds, with one clearly being from a diamond-shaped quarry. Two pieces of blue glass were also recovered from contexts (1000) and (1034), the latter of which was decorated with a series of curving lines, possibly from painted fabric or foliage. Other coloured pieces included a dark green fragment, which may have been painted, and a very tiny fragment of ruby flashed glass, both from context (1023).

This is a surprisingly small quantity of painted and coloured glass, given the proximity of the priory's church to the excavation area and the fact that, unlike window leads or plain glass, painted and coloured glass had very little resale value. However, given the discovery of significant quantities of grisaille glass during both the 1920s excavations (Walker 1926, 103–5) and subsequent Ministry of Works clearance (accessioned SHEFM.1982.309–23), it seems likely that the remainder of the decorated glass might have been dumped in a different area at the time of the Dissolution.

Although not glass artefacts, a brief discussion of lead cames is included here given the direct connection it has with the window glass (Fig. 14). 31 fragments of lead cames were recovered from twelve contexts (Fig. 15). These 'H'-shaped lead bars were used for connecting glass quarries into a larger glazing scheme. All the fragments are small, varying in length from approx. 15 mm to 120 mm.

All of the leads were produced before the widespread use of lead milling machines in the sixteenth century, as none bears the characteristic marks of that process (see Egan *et al.* 1986 for a wider discussion of the form and dating of these cames). However, giving a more definitive date is more problematic. Whilst five lead fragments certainly date from the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, due to a distinctive profile with a thick diamond-shaped flange with a central flash, the majority are more difficult to date. They all have a flange width of 4–5 mm and a heart width of 3–4 mm, giving a wide-mouthed profile, common dimensions for later medieval cames, or earlier cames with the diamond flashes completely scrapped away. It is also possible that some of these cames are early post-medieval, where profiles were still wide but the lead was now being produced in a toothless mill instead of moulded.

Several pieces from Context (1085) demonstrate cut or crimp marks, and the largest piece is notably twisted and torn open at one end. This indicates that several pieces were likely to have been violently pulled or cut from the glass, probably during the demolition of the church, or as part of the intentional recycling of materials after the Dissolution.

### **Metals (Alexander Cassels)**

The metalwork recovered during the Monk Bretton excavation largely consists of undiagnostic material. This includes a large number of iron nails relating to both the late medieval and post-medieval occupation of the site and waste copper and lead alloys which are related to the dismantling of the monastic buildings during and after the dissolution. Despite the undiagnostic nature of the majority of the metals, there are a few more significant finds that are described and illustrated below.

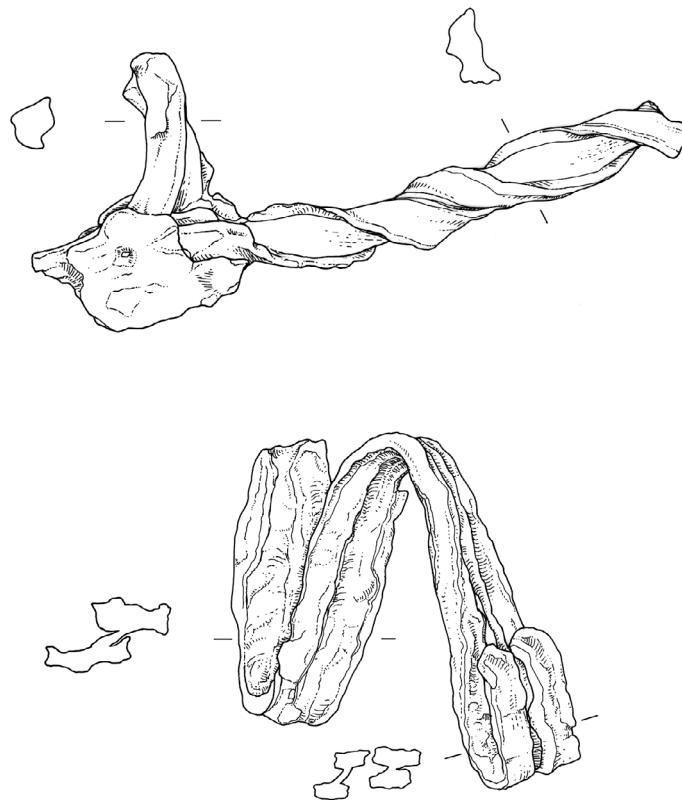


FIGURE 15 Twisted window leads (1:2).

### ***Copper alloy (Fig. 16)***

#### **(1) Thimble (1082)**

An incomplete late medieval or early post-medieval copper alloy thimble. The base is slightly splayed and wider than the top. The thimble has a tight spiral of pits running from the base up the sides. Around the base there is a band that is unstamped but contains a single continuous longitudinally engraved line. This example is similar to thimbles published from London (Egan 1998, 265–267) and probably dates to the fifteenth or sixteenth century (Fig. 16).

#### **(2) Pin (1016)**

A late medieval or early post-medieval copper alloy pin with a solid spherical head. This example is similar to pins published from excavations in London (Egan and Pritchard 1991, 299) and probably dates to between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

#### **(3) Mount (1016)**

A late medieval sheet copper alloy quatrefoil mount. The square sheet has a triangular section cut out of each side to create the four petals. The mount has a central hole for a, now missing, rivet. This example is similar to a mount recovered from Bedern Chapel, York (Ottaway and Rogers 2002, 2906) and dates to between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.

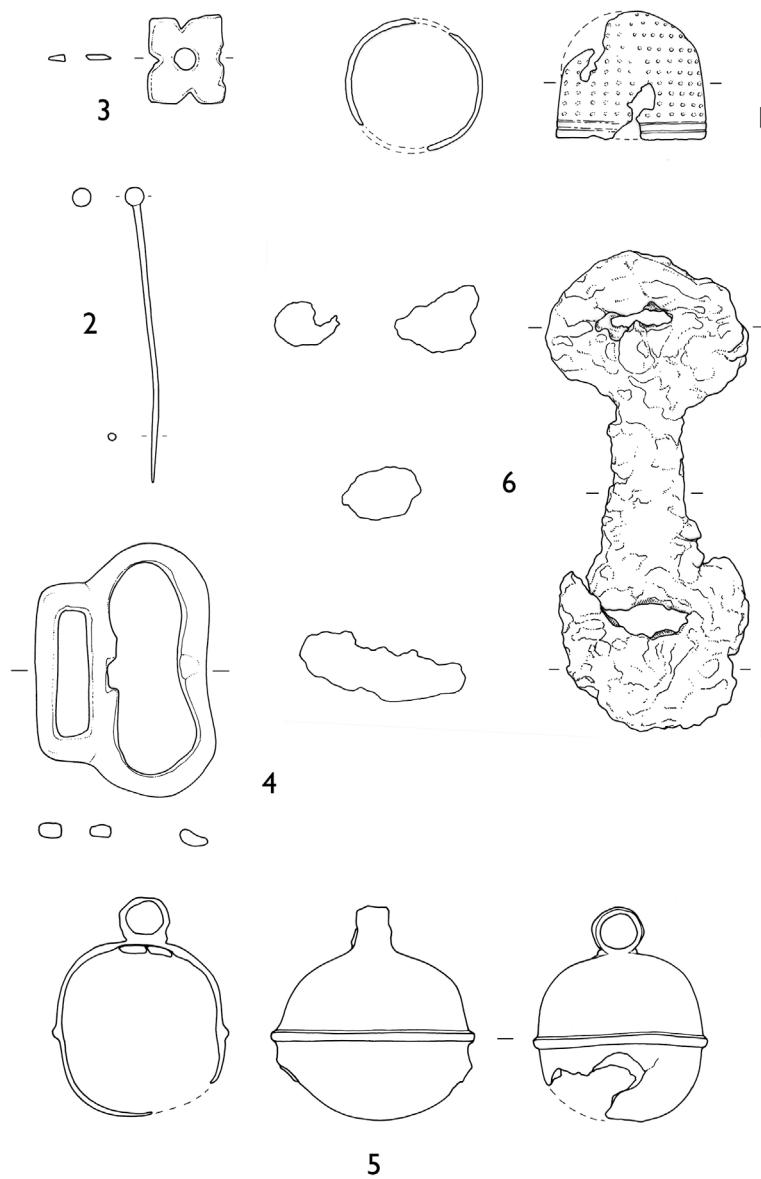


FIGURE 16 Cooper alloy and iron (1:1).

(4) Buckle (1083)

A late medieval copper alloy oval buckle frame with a small integral rectangular loop on the inside edge. The buckle was cast in one piece and has a constriction on the inside edge of the oval frame for the attachment of a pin. The outside edge of the frame is now slightly bent inwards. A similar example of this form of oval buckle frame was found as part of a suite of dress accessories within a grave from St. Mary Merton, Surry (Egan 2007, 228) and dates to between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

## (5) Bell (1034)

An incomplete late medieval or early post-medieval cast copper alloy spherical, or rumbler, bell. There is a central projecting rib around the diameter and a circular suspension loop at the top. The bell is undecorated. There is a slot across the lower half with a circular hole at each end. Bells of this form have been recovered from fifteenth century contexts in York (Ottaway and Rogers 2002, 2947) and from sixteenth century contexts in London (Egan 2005, 57) and are dated to between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database.

**Iron**

## (6) Key (1028)

An iron rotary key of uncertain date. The key has a kidney-shaped bow and solid shank with a circular cross section. It is heavily corroded and the exact form of the bit is uncertain. The key is a similar size and shape to a fourteenth-century example from London (Egan 1998, 114) but the corrosion of the metal does not allow a tighter date to be assigned.

**Lead alloy (Fig. 17)**

## (1) Roof lead (1034)

A sub-rectangular sheet of roofing lead. The sheet is bent along its length and on two corners. Probably of late medieval date (Fig. 17).

## (2) Roof lead (1034)

A sub-rectangular sheet of roofing lead which has been rolled into a cylinder. This example is from the same context as the previous artefact and they can probably be attributed to the stripping of the monastic buildings during the dissolution.

## (3) Weight (1034)

A lead alloy weight or spindle whorl of uncertain date. The weight is circular in plan with an off-centre circular hole. The object is undecorated and largely undiagnostic but probably dates to the late medieval or early post-medieval period.

## (4) Button (1026)

An incomplete circular lead alloy disc, possibly a button. The disc is broken across its diameter and contains a small circular central hole for attachment. This artefact possibly dates to the late medieval period but is more likely to be of post-medieval date.

## (5) Weight (1091)

A lead alloy weight or spindle whorl of uncertain date. The weight is circular in plan with a central circular hole. The object is undecorated and largely undiagnostic but probably dates to the late medieval or early post-medieval period.

**Animal bone (Elizabeth Wright)**

The faunal remains derived from contexts spanning from the medieval period to the twentieth century. Due to the limited size of the assemblage it is not possible to say much about change over time but it is still possible to give a general overview and interpretation

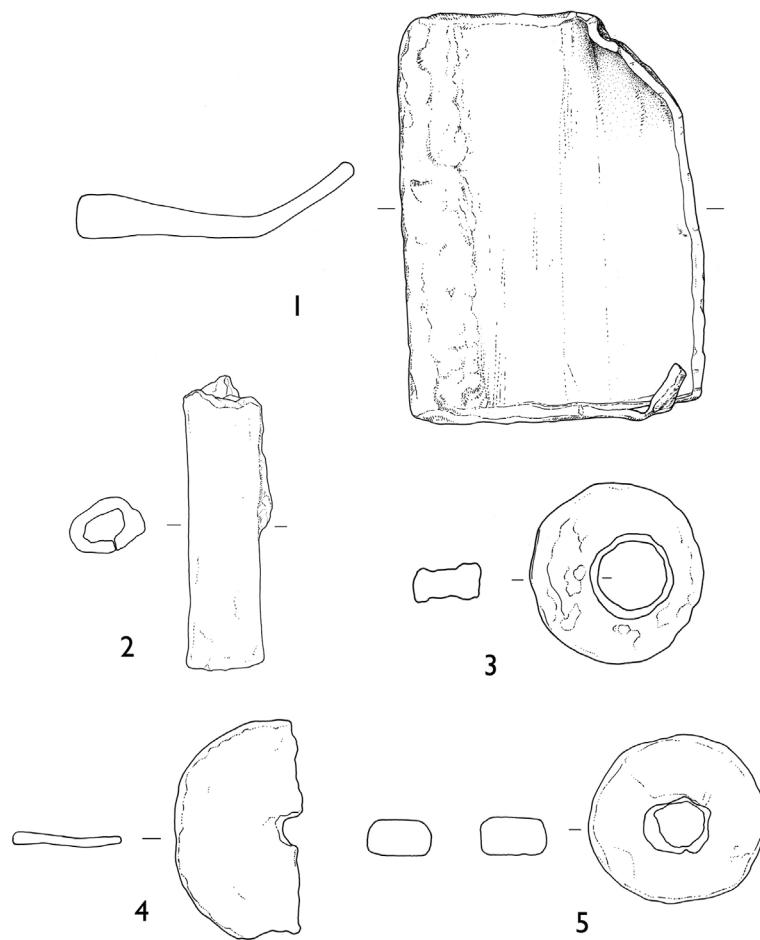


FIGURE 17 Lead finds (excluding window cames) (1:1).

of the use of animals at the site. Domestic animals predominate and the three main domestic taxa (cattle, sheep/goat and pig) are represented in all periods. The sheep/goat remains include specimens confidently identified as both sheep and goat in addition to indeterminate sheep/goat remains. In addition to the three common domesticates remains from horse, deer, a mustelid (polecat/ferret/stoat/weasel), birds, amphibians and molluscs were also encountered. Chicken is the most common of the birds, and both the chicken and goose remains are large, suggesting domesticated animals. The mollusc assemblage is mainly represented by oyster remains, with a few mussels. Both of these species are marine, and must have been imported to this inland site.

Of particular interest is the presence of deer in the sixteenth century, and both fallow and red deer have been identified, although in small numbers. Though there are few deer specimens, their presence in such a small assemblage likely attests to the high status of the site, as during this period deer hunting was restricted to the aristocracy (Clutton-Brock

1984, Grant 1988). The presence of wild birds further supports the suggestion of Monk Bretton being a site of high status during the sixteenth century.

A single mustelid bone from either a polecat, ferret, stoat or weasel was recovered, and these are all species listed by Veale (1966, cited by Serjeantson 1989) as being animals exploited for fur in the medieval period. The ferret (the domestic descendent of the Polecat) is known to have lived in Britain at least from the thirteenth century, when it was reared mainly for catching rabbits (Owen 1969). Very few conclusions can be drawn from the single bone at Monk Bretton, but the presence of polecats, ferrets, stoats or weasels would not be unusual on high-status medieval or post-medieval site.

The presence of chop and cut marks on several bones indicates without any doubt that at least some of this assemblage derives from human activities such as butchery and food consumption. The occurrence of butchery seems to be higher in cattle bones, which is not surprising considering the larger size of the carcass of this animal. Whilst sheep/goat bones also show a relatively high proportion of butchery, pig remains show a much lower proportion of butchery, although the small size of the assemblage prevents a confident assessment. Overall it would be expected that these three domestic species would show the highest proportion of butchery since they are the most frequently consumed taxa.

In summary, the faunal assemblage from Monk Bretton contains a diverse array of species, considering its small size. The three main domesticates: cattle, sheep/goat and pig predominate, and are present in all phases. Of special note is the presence of deer and bird in Phase 2 and 3 contexts, which is highly indicative of the site being one of high status during the sixteenth century. The presence of chop and cut marks confirm that the assemblage derives from human activity. Overall this assemblage provides evidence for a system of animal management and use common in medieval Britain.

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